

# When this bear's hunny doesn't taste that sweet

CINEMA SCOPE Damon Smith

THE dark age of celebrity parents monetising their cherubic children dawned many years before the scourge of selfies, social media and smart phones.

In the handsomely crafted drama *Goodbye Christopher Robin*, battle-scarred author A A Milne (Domhnall Gleeson) and his wife Daphne (Margot Robbie) treat their young son (Will Tilston) as a sales tool in the mid-1920s to promote the literary adventures of a hunny-loving bear called Winnie-The-Pooh.

The sacrifice of one little boy's childhood innocence for the happiness and healing of a shell-

shocked Britain, which has been devastated by the Great War, is at the wounded heart of Simon Curtis' picture.

The script by Frank Cottrell-Boyce (working from an original work by A Bear Named Winnie co-writer Simon Vaughan), gradually exposes the anguish and resentment that festered beneath the Hundred Acre Wood.

It's an emotionally chilly film, reflected in Gleeson's restrained performance, which internalises Milne's post-traumatic stress and shuts out his family as well as us.

*Goodbye Christopher Robin* is dedicated to the late producer Steve Christian, who died earlier this year.



'Sales tool' – Will Tilston stars as A A Milne's son Billy Moon in a scene from the film *Goodbye Christopher Robin* Picture:ALLSTAR/FOX SEARCHLIGHT



Flourishing – The ancient walled town of Volterra in western Tuscany is the most important centre for alabaster, excavating in nearby mines

# Ancient jewel that's prospered for more than two millennia

THE approach to the walled town of Volterra in western Tuscany resembles a scene from a Hollywood movie. Driving along the plain one suddenly sees the town at the summit of a hill. Arriving late on a sunny morning, the honey stone buildings reminded me of sets of beehives.

The ascent by road requires the visitor to encircle the hill until one arrives at the gate set into the Etruscan walls. Volterra is one of the oldest Etruscan towns in the region, dating back to the seventh century.

Lovers of Roman antiquities will head for the theatre which was unearthed in the 1950s. Admirers of Etruscan art might head for the painted tombs at nearby Villa Bona.

Volterra was always a prosperous town. Over two millennia ago it was an important centre of the production and benefited from trade along the nearby Via Cassia, linking Rome with southern France. It was also an important episcopal see in the medieval period.

Italy has suffered a number of earthquakes in recent years, but Tuscany has always been prone to devastating quakes. In 1117 the old medieval borgo or hamlet of Volterra was entirely destroyed by an earthquake.

Undeterred, the people restored their

homes and built a new cathedral which was consecrated just three years later by Pope Calixtus II. Over the next three centuries it was extended and filled with devotional works of art.

I was unable to enter the cathedral during my visit to Volterra. It is closed for renovation and is not due to open for another two years, hopefully in time for the anniversary of its consecration.

A stroll around the town is fascinating. It is still a thriving city and popular with visitors. The main square has the imposing town hall, with the coats of arms of municipal districts carved in stone and set into the wall. The cathedral lies to the rear of the town hall and from a nearby terrace one has a marvellous view of the surrounding coun-

tryside. Glistening in the distance are the waters of the Mediterranean.

From the late 14th century Volterra was controlled by Florence, firstly the republic and later by the Medici family. It was incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Florence while ensuring further expansion.

Art lovers should not miss the art gallery at the Palazzo Minucci-Soliani, which is attributed to Antonio Sangallo the Elder. It contains many paintings from churches in the region which are now closed.

Volterra is the most important centre for alabaster, excavating in nearby mines. Every shop has alluring souvenirs made from the translucent marble.

At the end of my day wandering around the medieval city, I was collected and brought to the wonderful Borgo Pignano, about half an hour drive from Volterra. I had been introduced to the property by the designer Guy Oliver, whose work includes Claridges and the Connaught in London.

Standing on the terrace of Borgo Pignano, one can easily understand what Paradise might look like. For miles stretch out acres of fields, vineyards with swelling grapes, turned a hazy blue under the September sun. Gazing westwards, once can glimpse a sliver

of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

The borgo was inhabited by the Etruscans as far back as 800 BC. A document dated 1129 AD confirms the transfer of the fortified castle and hamlet to the diocese of Volterra. To mark the donation, the bishop established a parish, appointed a priest, and authorised the construction of a chapel on the highest point of the tiny village.

The little village survived centuries of vicissitudes and was expanded by the noble Incontri family of Florence in the 17th century. But by the 20th century the family had sold off most of the land and the town was all but abandoned.

When Cardiff-born Michael Moritz came across the property over a decade ago, it was dilapidated. The entrepreneur, who made his fortune as an early investor in Google, purchased the hamlet and restored the Incontri residence which today is one of the finest hotels in western Tuscany.

Sir Michael Moritz's vision for Pignano is shared by his wife, who has overseen the restoration project. Although the couple live in San Francisco with their two sons Borgo Pignano is a jewel in their respective crowns. By opening the Borgo to guests, the Moritz's have breathed new life into the region.

Although the main castle is extremely comfortable, the Borgo Pignano experience is more than lounging around gazing at the surrounding countryside. One may sip a *Martini* watching the setting sun sizzle into the sea, but one has to earn it.

A good way to start is to walk through the 750 acres of the estate's woodland. There are a number of paths of varying inclines, each winding through the forest. From time to time the panorama opens and one sees and vista which would have had Raphael reaching for his paintbrushes.

There is a waterfall where some of the more intrepid choose to take a picnic.

Borgo Pignano is an eco-farm and most of the food is produced from the land. The remarkable breakfast muesli is a testament to the fertility of the region. The trees of the estate produce fruit and nuts in season.

Antonio, the estate gardener, cultivates all the vegetables which end up on the guest's plates. I also saw where the grapes are pressed, and witnessed how soap is made from olive oil and flowers. I was fascinated to see the production of honey from the estate's hives and another delicacy which ends up on the guest's table.

Borgo Pignano is very popular with English guests and indeed a popular honeymoon destination. The drawback is its remoteness, so a car is required to visit nearby attractions such as San Gimignano and Montecatini, both about 12 miles away. There is also a chauffeur service which, when all is considered, makes life bliss!



'Paradise' – 'Although the main castle is extremely comfortable, the Borgo Pignano experience is more than lounging around gazing at the surrounding countryside'

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